P 96

INFORMING YOUR CUSTOMERS:

# A Guide to Publicizing New Postal Facilities

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**ASSISTANT POSTMASTER GENERAL**
Public and Employee Communications Department
Washington, DC 20260-3100

January 1986

Dear Postmaster:

The construction of a modern postal building offers tangible evidence of the Postal Service's commitment to serve your community. In addition, this construction provides a unique opportunity for postmasters to generate community support for the new postal facility and for the Postal Service itself.

Just as efficient postal operations and a smooth construction program do not "just happen," the enhancement of public support and appreciation for a new postal facility requires a plan.

This guide will help you prepare and implement such an effort while your new facility is being planned, designed and constructed. It contains practical advice, convenient fill-in news releases and other information that will help you make your new facility and the Postal Service a very welcome and valued member of the community.

Its contents also can be adapted for leased facilities.

Sincerely,

Mary J. Layton

Mary J. Layton

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# Informing Your Customers:
# A Guide to Publicizing New Postal Facilities

## REGIONAL CONTACTS

The following members of the Public and Employee Communications Department's regional offices made valuable contributions to this guide. They would be pleased to help you develop a real estate public relations program.

**Central Region** -

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or 312/765-5293

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**Southern Region** -

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**Western Region** -

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Program Manager
Communications
U.S. Postal Service
850 Cherry Avenue
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**PUBLIC INFORMATION GUIDELINES**
**FOR POSTAL FACILITY PROJECTS**

When you or your public affairs officer/specialist are asked about a proposed post office project in your community, you need to know:

1) the planning process involved in the project,
2) the status of the project,
3) when an official decision or announcement on the project is expected.

If you are not sure of the status, do not guess. Instead, ask the reporter or official how soon the answers are needed. Then call the contact person in your regional Public and Employee Communications (P&EC) Division to find out the answers before responding.

In the past, media inquiries on real estate projects have been handled by the regional office of the Public and Employee Communications Department. Questions on controversial matters, such as a contested site selection, still should be referred to the P&EC office. P&EC also will provide information and advice to you when you wish to respond directly to the media. Feel free to ask the advice of regional Public and Employee Communications contacts listed on page 3 or field public affairs officers in your area.

A sample news inquiry sheet can be found on page 7. Please be sure to send a copy or a memo outlining your media contact and the information given to the regional P&EC office immediately after each inquiry.

Meanwhile, here are some DOs and DON'Ts on how to handle public inquiries about your new facility:

- DO answer truthfully questions on the current status of a project and past decisions that have been made regarding it. Make sure you understand the rationale of past decisions. The reporter may not be aware of the rationale before talking with you.

- DO feel free to share your personal knowledge on the need for the proposed project -- community growth, shortcomings of the existing facility, etc.

- o DON'T speculate on future decisions.

- o DON'T GUESS. Get the correct information before responding. Check the reporter's deadline and call him or her back even if you have not verified the information in time to pass it on to them.

- o DON'T offend local feelings by taking sides in public disputes over site choice or other technical factors.

Finally, remember that your new facility is part of a larger postal system serving your community. Don't forget to keep the public informed of ancillary changes to other nearby facilities -- for instance, the temporary shut-down of a facility that is being modified or the fact that the "old" facility will continue to offer full retail and post office box services to customers in the downtown area.

**NEWS INQUIRY SHEET**

Reporter's name:_____

Station/publication:_____

Phone number (area code):_____

Date:_____ Time:_____

Inquiry answered by:_____

_____

Information Requested:

_____

Source of data used to reply:

_____

Reply or comment:

Date of response:_____ Time:_____

As soon as query is answered, send original and one copy to: Regional General Manager, P&EC.

## HOW TO PUBLICIZE YOUR NEW POSTAL FACILITY

Several programs and materials are already available to help a postmaster use the construction of a new facility to generate positive news about the Postal Service, improve community relations and promote postal programs. Some suggestions on how and when to use them follow.

### Before construction begins

Announce the news about your building plans with a ceremonial unveiling of the architect's illustration, called a rendering, of the new building. Call your regional Public and Employee Communications office for help in obtaining a rendering and planning the event. P&EC also will help you obtain black-and-white copies to accompany news releases.

Headline your display of the plans with the points you consider most important to the community -- more parking spaces, a more efficient building, solar power to save energy, renovation with historic preservation, etc.

Tie in other lobby displays in your existing facility or its stations and branches. For instance, if you will be getting automated equipment now that space is available, display photos of such equipment along with information on the ZIP + 4 code. If additional post office boxes will be available, do a poster on the advantages of post office box service and how to obtain one.

Remember your internal public, your own employees. Handbook AS-501, Postal Facility Activation, offers a useful guide in Appendix B on preparing information for postal employees.

### During construction

Keep the architect's rendering on display. It shows the goal of all our efforts.

Use photographs to show site development -- before, during and after. Instant-camera shots will do. Attach captions so customers will understand what they're seeing. This attention-getting display can be rotated through employee and public areas in stations and branches as well.

Issue news releases and post information in your lobby giving periodic updates on the new building's status -- 25 percent completed, halfway there, etc. Important: Coordinate status reports with regional P&EC staff and with your facilities manager to ensure consistency.

You might consider taking this opportunity to work with a local historical society or community group to develop a postal history for your area. When was the first post office constructed in your town? Who were the postmasters? When did city delivery start in your area? It might make a possible feature story for your local newspaper.

You can obtain a list of post office sites by writing to:

National Archives and Records Administration
NNFJ
8th St. and Pennsylvania Ave.
Washington, D.C. 20408-0001

You can obtain a list of postmasters from:

Research Administrator/Historian
U. S. Postal Service
475 L'Enfant Plaza, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20260-0012

**After construction is completed**

Issue a news release announcing the "grand opening" of your new facility. A sample release can be found on page 19.

Plan an "open house" for employees, their families and customers. The Postmaster's Kit for Open House and Special Tours, published by the Public and Employee Communications Department at headquarters, presents guidelines and sample materials to help you with this project. While periodic open houses foster better understanding of the Postal Service mission at any time, they are especially useful in familiarizing your customers with the advantages of a new postal facility.

The fact sheet found on page 25 can be distributed during an open house or be used in answering media inquiries. It also can be included with your letters to employees and business leaders. If you have the resources, add a photograph or sketch of the building to the fact sheet.

## GUIDE TO WRITING NEWS RELEASES

The two principal objectives of communications with the media by postal officials are:

1. to generate support for the major goals and programs of the Postal Service.

2. to reduce misunderstandings and to counter criticism by keeping the public accurately informed of postal developments, consistent with management policies and the public's right to know.

In most cases, a new postal facility generates positive publicity. It demonstrates the Postal Service's commitment to the community and offers an excellent opportunity to describe postal accomplishments.

Where there might be negative publicity with regard to a facility, it usually relates to only one part of the overall picture. Your regional P&EC office can assist you in these cases.

The postmaster, or the person designated, is responsible for initiating news coverage announcing selection of a site. He or she should work with the media before and during construction of a new facility. The most far-reaching way to fulfill your responsibility of keeping your community informed is through the news media.

Consult your Postmaster's Guide to Communications. If you don't have this publication, the recommendations below will assist you in writing a news release. In addition, sample releases can be found on pages 13, 15, 17 and 19.

- Be sure to include your name, telephone number (with area code) and the date at the top of your news release.

- Remember to include five W's and an H in your release -- tell the reader Who, What, When, Where, Why and How.

- Keep in mind why the public would be interested in your news. Relate your good news to the customer.

- Do not type your release in all capital letters.

- Be sure postal operations are described in terms a non-postal person can understand. For example, saying a postal clerk knows his or her scheme may sound sinister to a customer, unless you explain further. Spell it out -- Bulk Mail Center, not BMC.

- Use only one side of the paper.

- If your release runs two pages, type "(more)" at the bottom of the first page so an editor will know your story continues. At the conclusion of your release, type "-30-" or "end."

- Leave a margin of at least one inch on both sides of the page, and be sure to double-space your copy.

Remember, reporters generally like the ABC's -- accuracy, brevity and clarity.

(Postmaster: Retype the following fill-in release on your letterhead and distribute to local media. You can obtain the information needed to complete the release from your regional P&EC office.)

(Contact Name)
(Contact Phone No.)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
(Date)

SITE ACQUIRED FOR NEW (NAME) POST OFFICE

The U.S. Postal Service will build a new (type of facility) at (location), Postmaster (name) said.

The (size) site is located at (give landmark -- intersection, etc.). It was purchased from (name of owners, address) for $(amount).

Next, the Postal Service will hire an architect to design the building.

The new facility will offer additional parking for customers and employees, a modern lobby and space needed to sort mail more efficiently. (Or list other advantages.)

-30-

(Postmaster: Retype the following fill-in release on your letterhead and distribute to local media. You can obtain information needed to complete the release from your regional P&EC office.)

(Contact Name)
(Contact Phone No.)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
(Date)

ARCHITECT SELECTED TO DESIGN (NAME) POST OFFICE

The U.S. Postal Service awarded a contract to the architectural firm of (name) to design the new (name of facility), Postmaster (name) said today.

The new postal-owned building will have approximately (amount) square feet of floor space and will be located on a (size) site at (address). The site was purchased in (month/year) for $(amount).

When the architect completes the design in (month/year), the Postal Service will seek construction bids.

(Name of architect) is located at (address).

-30-

(Postmaster: Retype the following fill-in release on your letterhead and distribute to local media. You can obtain information needed to complete the release from your regional P&EC office.)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
(Date)

(Contact Name)
(Contact Phone No.)

(NAME OF FIRM) WILL BUILD NEW (NAME OF FACILITY)

The U.S. Postal Service has awarded a contract to construct a new (name of facility), Postmaster (name) said today.

(Name of construction company) of (city/state) will build the (size) facility on a site at (address) in (city). Construction will cost approximately $(amount) and will be completed in (month/year).

The new facility will be open to the public in (month/year).

It will offer additional parking and a more modern lobby. (List these or other improvements in which you think the public will be interested).

-30-

(Postmaster: Fill in this release and adapt it to suit your needs, retype it -- double-spaced -- on your letterhead, then distribute it to the news media serving your community. Your regional P&EC office will be pleased to assist you, upon request.)

(Contact Name)
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (Contact Phone No.)
(Date)

NEW (NAME) POST OFFICE COMPLETED

The U.S. Postal Service has completed a modern $(amount) facility to serve (city).

The (name of new facility) began operations on (date), according to Sectional Center Manager/Postmaster (name). It processes mail for ZIP Codes (list).

Located at (address), the building provides space for equipment that processes mail more efficiently and economically than sorting by hand. (City) now can take advantage of automated (optical character readers/bar code sorters) which process mail five times more quickly than mechanical equipment and 12 times faster than the human hand.

The new building also offers more parking for customers and employees.

"Customers are going to benefit from the new post office," Postmaster (name) said. "Not only is our lobby

(more)

more attractive for people purchasing stamps and services, our behind-the-scenes work area has more space (or better arranged space). This improves our overall operation.

"Postal employees have a better work environment, and the added space helps our operation run more efficiently."

Approximately (number) employees work in the (facility). Of these, (number) work during the night so that local mail can be delivered the next day.

They process more than (number) million pieces of mail each year.

The (number)-square-foot building is located on a (number)-acre site. It was designed by (name, city and state of architect) and constructed by (name of construction company).

(Describe any unusual features -- solar power, for example.)

The (name of former facility) will continue to offer full retail services to customers. However, the rest of the building will be made available for other uses. (Note: Substitute following paragraph where appropriate: The old building will be returned to the lessor, [name of company or

(more)

individual]. All postal services will be offered at the new facility.)

The (name of new unit) is one of more than 39,000 postal facilities across the nation.

In 1985, postal employees processed and delivered over 140 billion pieces of mail.

"We're proud of that record," Postmaster (name) said, "and our new building will help us serve (city) even better in the years ahead."

-30-

## LETTER TO EMPLOYEES

(Postmaster: This letter can be sent to each employee at his or her home or can be adapted for an employee newsletter.)

Dear Employee:

After (number) years of preparation and construction, our new building is ready for occupancy. The (name of facility), located at (address), will provide a better working environment for all of us. I am sure you will share my enthusiasm once we move to our new office.

Meanwhile, I thought you might like to know more about the (name of building).

It is constructed of (type of material) and situated on a (size) lot. The building has (number) square feet, of which (number) are designated as work floor space, (number) for offices and (number) for employee lounges and our cafeteria. Our former facility had a total of only (number) square feet.

The exterior of the building is covered in (type of material).

Our building was designed by (name and city of architect) and constructed by (name and city of builder). The total cost, including move-in expenses, will be approximately $(amount) million.

The Postal Service (owns the site and buildings) (has a [number]-year, renewable lease on the site and buildings).

There are (number) parking spaces for employees and (number) for customers.

Carriers serving ZIP Codes (list) will work in our building, as will employees processing mail for ZIP Code areas (list).

In the near future, we will hold an open house for you and your family. Meanwhile, the attached fact sheet gives further information about our new accommodations.

Sincerely,

Postmaster

Attachment

**FACT SHEET**

Main Post Office
Street Address
City, State & ZIP + 4 Code
Phone Number

1. Average daily mail volume:
2. Number of possible daily deliveries (business, residential, rural):
3. Customers served:
4. Number of employees:
5. Number of vehicles:
6. Annual revenue:
7. Annual operating costs:
8. Building size:
9. Site size:
10. Number of parking spaces for customers:
11. Number of parking spaces for employees:
12. Mail service first began:
13. Number of employees then:
14. Previous post offices in community constructed: (when and where)
15. Number of post office boxes:
16. Number of collection boxes:
17. Number of Letter Sorting Machines (LSMs):
18. Number of Optical Character Readers (OCRs) and Bar Code Sorters (BCSs):

Postmaster: (Full Name)

## LETTER TO BUSINESS LEADERS

(Postmaster: You may wish to send a letter to business leaders in your community. The following draft also can be adapted as a letter to city officials.)

Dear (Mr./Ms.)(Name):

In (month/year), the U.S. Postal Service completed construction of a larger, more modern (general mail facility/post office) to serve (community) better. We will open for business at this location at (time) on (date).

All postal services are offered at this location. It will be open from (hours of operation). You can also take advantage of the self-service postal center at the (direction) of the lobby to purchase stamps and stamped envelopes and to weigh parcels.

In addition, we will continue to provide full retail and post office box services at the (name of former facility), now designated as the (new name).

The (name of facility), which handles your mail and that for ZIP Code area(s) (first three digits), is located on a (size) site at (address).

The grounds offer (number) parking spaces for our customers and (number) for postal employees.

The building itself is (number) square feet. The lobby includes additional post office boxes (and a self-service postal center) for your convenience.

Behind the scenes, increased work space allows us to house a new, very efficient piece of postal equipment -- an optical character reader (OCR). With this, we can sort mail more efficiently, more accurately and more economically.

The OCR can be used effectively with ZIP-Coded mail but becomes even more effective with mail bearing the ZIP + 4 code.

I would be pleased to schedule a tour of our new facility for you and members of your staff. Please feel free to contact me or your customer service representative if we can assist you in any way.

Sincerely,

Postmaster